

APPENDIX G



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More about bowel cancer staging

This page tells you about bowel cancer staging using the TNM and number staging systems. You can scroll down the page to read all the information here. Or you can use these links to go straight down to sections on

- [Why staging is important](#)
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Why staging is important

The stage of a cancer tells the doctor how far the cancer has spread. It is important because treatment is often based on the stage of a cancer. More doctors are now using the TNM stages or the number stages of bowel cancer. These stages are used across the world and are taking over from the [Dukes staging system](#). It doesn't matter which one your doctor uses as long as you understand what it means.

TNM staging

'TNM' stands for Tumour, Node, Metastases. This staging system can

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describe the size of a primary tumour (T), whether there are lymph nodes with cancer cells in them (N) and whether the cancer has spread to a different part of the body (M).

There are four stages of tumour size in colorectal cancer

- T1 means the tumour has grown no further than the inner layer of the bowel
- T2 means the tumour has grown into the muscle layer of the bowel wall
- T3 means the tumour has broken through the membrane covering the outside of the bowel
- T4 means the tumour has grown into other organs or body structures nearby such as the liver, gullet (oesophagus) or abdominal wall

There are 3 possible stages of lymph node involvement

- N0 means there are no lymph nodes containing cancer cells
- N1 means there are cancer cells in between 1 and 3 nearby lymph nodes
- N2 means there are cancer cells in 4 or more lymph nodes that are further than 3cm away from the main tumour in the bowel OR There are cancer cells in lymph nodes connected to the main blood vessels around the bowel

There are two stages of cancer spread (metastasis)

- M0 means there is no cancer spread to other organs
- M1 means the cancer has spread to other parts of the body

Number stages of colorectal cancer

There are four main stages in this system. They are

- [Stage 0 or carcinoma in situ](#)
- [Stage 1](#)
- [Stage 2](#)
- [Stage 3](#)
- [Stage 4](#)

Stage 0 or carcinoma in situ (CIS)

If you are told you have CIS or stage 0 colorectal cancer, you have a very early stage of colorectal cancer. There are cancer cells in your bowel lining. But they are all confined within the lining of the bowel. So there is very little risk of any cancer cells having spread. It is very unusual for bowel cancer to be diagnosed this early.

Stage 1

This is the earliest stage of cancer. It means the cancer has grown through the inner lining of the bowel, or into the muscle wall but no further. There is no cancer in the lymph nodes (T1, N0, M0 or T2, N0, M0).

Stage 2

This stage is divided into 2a and 2b

- Stage 2a means that there are no cancer cells in the lymph nodes, but the cancer has broken through the outer covering of the bowel (T3, N0, M0)
- Stage 2b means that the cancer has grown through the outer covering of the bowel wall and into tissues or organs (T4) next to the bowel. But there are no lymph nodes affected (N0) and no cancer spread to another area of the body (M0).

Stage 3

Stage 3 is divided into 3a and 3b

Stage 3 is divided into 3 stages

- Stage 3a means that the cancer is still in the inner layer of the bowel wall or has grown into the muscle layer and between 1 and 3 nearby lymph nodes contain cancer cells (T1, N1, M0 or T2, N1, M0)
- Stage 3b means that the cancer has grown through the bowel wall or into surrounding body tissues or organs and between 1 and 3 nearby lymph nodes contain cancer cells (T3, N1, M0 or T4, N1, M0)
- Stage 3c means that the cancer can be any size, has spread to 4 or more nearby lymph nodes but there is no cancer spread to any other part of the body (any T, N2, M0)

Stage 4

This means your cancer has spread to other parts of the body (such as the liver or lungs) through the lymphatic system or bloodstream (any T, any N, M1).

